

Art, Culture and Controversy
CTILAC Project
Bellevue Community College
International Programs
Level 6 – Academic Preparation for Content Courses

These activities are designed for advanced students of English as a Second Language who will soon be matriculating into credit classes with native speakers of English. They are meant to supplement a unit on folklore and folk objects. These activities are intended to teach such students to improve critical thinking skills, which are not emphasized in the educational systems of many of the countries of these students, where rote memorization is the traditional mode of learning.

ART, CULTURE AND CONTROVERSY**PART #1 – DEFINING ART**

ACTIVITY OUTCOMES – Students will be able to:

- ❖ Find specific information using library reference materials
- ❖ Write a coherent summary without plagiarizing
- ❖ Cite sources using correct MLA format

ACTIVITY 2

_____/100 Points

1. Find two brief definitions of “art” using two different types of reference materials. (e.g., a dictionary, an encyclopedia or a book).
2. Summarize each definition and cite each source at the end of each summary. Use additional paper if necessary.
3. Attach copies of the definitions you summarized.

DEFINITION 1

DEFINITION 2

ART, CULTURE AND CONTROVERSY
PART #1 – DEFINING ART
TEACHER NOTES

- ❖ Students start this unit with a library orientation tour focusing on finding reference books and using the library catalog to find specific information in books in circulation. After the orientation, students will be paired to complete a short in-library activity to see how well they can apply their skills. During the following class period, their results will be compared and discussed.
- ❖ Students will learn how to write MLA citations for books and reference materials. The explanation and short activity may be taken from “Klein, Brock, and Hunt, Matthew, and Lee, Robert. The Essential Workbook for Library and Internet Research. McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 1999. 47-49.
- ❖ The students will do an in-class timed writing on their definition of “art.” They will be told to “free-write” with the focus on content rather than grammar, mechanics or organization. This is especially important to stress for ESL students as they often get bogged down with syntax rather than content. They will otherwise be given “carte blanche” as to how they choose to define this term. The expectation is that students will honestly express how they view their concept of “art.” This will be used as a jumping off point for further activities.
- ❖ Students will then be told to find two brief definitions of “art” using two different types of reference sources. Then, they will meet in small groups to discuss the following:
 - ❖ How is your personal definition of art similar to the definitions you found in the library?
 - ❖ How is your personal definition different?
 - ❖ How does your definition compare to others in your group? Why do you think it is similar or different?
 - ❖ Do you believe your definition is rooted in your culture? Why/why not?

It may be helpful to follow-up this discussion with a visual presentation of various types of art from around the world. Ask students if they can identify the probable place of origin based on the work itself. In so doing, they should see how art can be rooted in culture.

After this, a more thorough study of an extended definition of folk objects could be examined. In order to do this, the students in the pilot class will be using their class text, “Brinton, Donna. Insights 1 – A Content-based Approach to Academic Preparation. Los Angeles. Longman, 1997. 6-8.” This text includes two types of extended definition with the typical characteristics of each. Students may also explore extended definition in literature through a short story such as, “My Navajo Home in Los Angeles,” from the same text as above (pages 9-10). In this story, the students are asked to identify the folk objects being described and the significance of each within the Navajo culture.

**ART, CULTURE AND CONTROVERSY
PART #2 – DEFINING A CONTROVERSY**

ACTIVITY 1

controversy

A dispute, especially a lengthy and public one, between sides holding opposing views. (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 1973)

ACCORDING TO THE DEFINITION ABOVE, WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING POSITIONS COULD BE DEFINED AS CONTROVERSIAL?

- ❖ people shouldn't drive over the speed limit
- ❖ government shouldn't provide free cocaine to the public
- ❖ abortion should be outlawed
- ❖ prayer should be allowed in public schools
- ❖ the U.S. should have stricter gun control laws
- ❖ people shouldn't cheat on their taxes
- ❖ self-proclaimed gays should not be allowed to serve in the military
- ❖ the government should issue education vouchers so parents can choose to educate their children where they want
- ❖ parents should not abuse their children

List three issues that are currently considered controversial in your country. Be prepared to present both sides of these issues to the class tomorrow.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

ART, CULTURE AND CONTROVERSY
PART #2 – IDENTIFYING CONTROVERSY IN ART

Activity 2
100 Points

ACTIVITY OUTCOMES: - Students will be able to:

- ❖ use the WEB to locate a specific site
- ❖ develop classifications for specific items
- ❖ demonstrate the ability to categorize information in a logical manner
- ❖ demonstrate the ability to explain reasoning

Directions:

1. Locate the following article on the WEB: "Ten Works of Art That Have Rocked the Ages."
Newsweek 11 Oct. 1999.
2. Decide which common characteristics the ten works of art in the above article have (think about why they're controversial).
3. Create categories based on these common characteristics. (The number of categories you have will depend on how you personally choose to look at each piece of art.)
4. Place each piece of art into one of your categories.
5. Briefly explain in writing why you have placed each item where you have.

ART, CULTURE AND CONTROVERSY

PART #2 – IDENTIFYING CONTROVERSY IN ART

ACTIVITY 3

100 Points

ACTIVITY OUTCOMES – Students will be able to:

- ❖ Demonstrate an understanding of a controversy
- ❖ Find specific information from outside resources (library, WEB)
- ❖ Make a clear, thorough oral report to the class

Directions:

Using at least two sources from the library and/or the WEB, locate a picture and/or a more detailed description of the specific piece of art you have been assigned

Hand in the citations for the sources you used

Using effective oral presentation skills, share the following with the class:

- ❖ a description and, if possible, a picture of your piece of art
- ❖ your sources
- ❖ why you believe this piece of art **was** controversial (Consider the time in history, the culture in which it was presented and any other information you feel is relevant to its being considered controversial.)
- ❖ whether or not you feel this piece of art would **currently** be considered controversial in your society or in American society (Include the reasons for your opinion.)
- ❖ a 5-minute period at the end of your presentation for questions and discussion

NOTE: You will have 15-20 minutes to make your presentation and will be evaluated on the following criteria:

Preparation

Comprehensibility

Connection with Audience

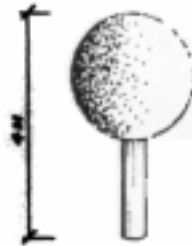
Timing

Depth of Content

ART, CULTURE AND CONTROVERSY
PART #2 – IDENTIFYING CONTROVERSY IN ART
TEACHER NOTES

- ❖ Students will start this unit by classifying types of activities from the weekend guide in the local newspaper. In addition, they will discuss the following two questions about the cartoon below. Chaffee, John. Thinking Critically. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000:285.

THE TREE, as seen by...



the planner...



the parks department...



the publisher...



the highway department...



the developer...



the landscape architect.

From PULP! Used by permission of Louis Hellman.

1. How does the above picture illustrate how a tree can be seen from a variety of views?
2. What other objects could be reflected in such a variety of views? Explain.

- ❖ The concept of what a controversy is will be introduced through the controversy definition paper.
- ❖ Reporting skills will be reviewed through discussion.

Each student will be assigned one of the pieces of art to research from the article, "Ten Works of Art That Rocked the Ages," (See page 6)

Schedule several sessions in a computer lab to assist the students in their WEB searches for information about their specific artist or pieces of art. The students need to be encouraged to stay on track in their searches as some tend to look for general information about the work as opposed to how it specifically relates to the assignment questions.

During the reports, ask the other students to take notes and question the speakers at the end of each presentation to clarify anything they are unsure about. Telling the students that they are "responsible" for the information in the reports helps them take a more active role.

When all reports are done, the students will work in groups of 3-4 to complete the assignment below. They will need to have their original controversial art categories from Activity 2 in order to complete the assignment.

The students will be asked to use the information that they heard from the oral reports and decide as a group how they would revise their original categories. Following each group's discussion, they will present their revised categories and reasoning to the class. I often give students an OH plastic and pen on which to record their ideas and more easily share with the class.

Following this, the students will read and discuss the following article: "Offensive Art Depends on Your Cultural Prism." Seattle Times 3 Oct. 1999.

Part 2 will end with a viewing and discussion of the 1999 PBS program: Culture Shock: *The Shock of the Nude: Manet's Olympia*. The video and extensive teaching ideas can be found to accompany this lesson at www.pbs.org/wgbh/cultureshock/beyond/manet.html.

**ART, CULTURE AND CONTROVERSY
FINAL PROJECT
STUDENT ASSIGNMENT SHEET**

ACTIVITY OUTCOMES – Students will be able to:

- ❖ Develop a perspective on a piece of art
- ❖ See things from different views
- ❖ Compare perspectives and interpretations
- ❖ Work cooperatively on a group project and presentation

You and your group partners will have the next four weeks to do an in-depth study of one of the projects listed below.

Point Value: 300

Evaluation Criteria

- ❖ Ability to follow directions
- ❖ Ability to work effectively in a group
- ❖ Ability to creatively engage the audience in your presentation
- ❖ Ability to communicate your ideas clearly
- ❖ Ability to adequately research specific information

GROUP PROJECT CHOICES

1. Study the following pieces of permanent art here at BCC: *The Doors, the fountain at mid-court, the structure in front of the theater, the mosaic tiled court in front of Building B*. Find out as much as information as you can about the history of these pieces of art. Search for this information in the library, on-line and from oral interviews of people on campus and in the community. In your presentation, include the following:
 - ❖ An oral description and a clear photo/video of each piece of art

- ❖ What the history of the work is
 - ❖ What the work signifies
 - ❖ Whether or not you found any controversy surrounding the art (if none found, what objections you believe some people may have had)
 - ❖ How you view the art
 - ❖ How you believe this art is reflective of American culture
 - ❖ How you believe this art would be received in your culture
 - ❖ A question/answer and discussion period at the end
 - ❖ An optional hands-on activity related to the presentation for the class members to participate in
2. Visit a local museum or another place which exhibits art (park, neighborhood, district, gallery). Choose 3-4 pieces of art that you think could be viewed as controversial. Interview other patrons and the docents of the museum for their opinions about the art. In your presentation, include the following:
- ❖ An oral description and a visual representation of each piece of art (photo, picture, video, drawing, sculpture).
 - ❖ The reasons you think the art could be viewed as controversial
 - ❖ Input by others viewing the art (i.e. patrons, docents, observers)
 - ❖ Your opinions of the art
 - ❖ How you think the art reflects the artist's culture and why
 - ❖ Any other relevant/interesting information
 - ❖ A question/answer and discussion period at the end
 - ❖ An optional hands-on activity for the class members to participate in

PRESENTATION FORMAT

Time Frame: 50 minutes per group

*All members of the group must play an equal part in the presentation

1. Present in a traditional way reporting the information using a variety of audio/visual aids (OH, Power Point, film or video clips, posters, pictures, music, etc.)

2. Present in a less traditional way. Below are several possibilities though you are not limited to those shown below.
 - ❖ A mock talk show including a host, the artist, those in support of/opposed to the art, etc...
 - ❖ A debate centered around the controversy
 - ❖ A town meeting with the rest of the class as town members
 - ❖ A video-taped walking tour including interviews of passersby
 - ❖ A mock dialogue between the artist, viewers and the piece of art
3. Present a combination of both of the aforementioned ideas

**ART, CULTURE AND CONTROVERSY
FINAL PROJECT
TEACHER NOTES**

Go over the directions for the projects with the class. Have several examples. The following pieces of art were a few presented by some of the groups in my class and could serve as examples:

- ❖ *To Raise the Water Level in a Fishpond* by Zhang Huan
- ❖ *Taking a Picture in Front of Tiananmen* by Wang Jinsong
- ❖ *Ghosts Pounding the Wall* by Xu Bing

Visuals and information about the above three can be found at

<http://www.asiasociety.org/arts/insideout/images/>

- ❖ *Sin (Die Suende)* by Franz Stuck (http://www.fryeart.org/detail_c3.html)

The students in the pilot group had great luck with getting observers and those working at the museums to share in their explorations as they studied the works. In addition, the WEB provided a wealth of information about many of the artists and their major pieces of work.

Encourage the students to get creative with their presentations. They can have a great deal of fun with background music, costuming, props and scenery. The students presenting and those in the audience typically become much more engaged in these presentations with a highly creative bent and are much more willing to get actively involved in the discussions and activities that follow.

I end this unit with a “spam-carving” activity. It’s amazing how creative and even controversial students can get with a plastic knife, a can of spam and their imaginations. Great fun!

**ART, CULTURE AND CONTROVERSY
EXTRA-CREDIT ASSIGNMENT**

ACTIVITY OUTCOMES – Students will be able to:

- ❖ Identify values within their cultures reflected through visual art
- ❖ Use the library and/or the WEB to find illustrations of this art

Assignment Value: 50 Points

Directions:

Think of a renowned artist from your culture whom you believe reflects the values and beliefs of your culture. This can be a contemporary artist or one from the past. Using the library and/or the WEB, find several pictures of his/her pieces of art, which you should include in your report. Start out with a detailed description of the art. Then, explain specifically what makes this art so reflective of your culture. Finally, tell how the art illustrates the values of your culture. Include citations for your sources at the end of your paper.